DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 670 EA 024 603

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TITLE The Changing Role of the Local School District Superintendent in the United States. Occasional Papers: School Leadership and Education Reform. OP #2.
INSTITUTION National Center for School Leadership, Urbana, IL.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 6 Apr 91
CONTRACT R117C80003
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL April 3-7, 1991).
AVAILABLE FROM National Center for School Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1208 W. Springfield Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801 ($4).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Effectiveness; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership Styles; Leadership Training; Management Development; Organizational Climate; *Organizational Effectiveness; *School Effectiveness; *Superintendents

ABSTRACT

The changing role of the local school district superintendent is examined in this paper, which focuses on the link between the local education executive officers and school effectiveness. It is argued that the concept of the superintendency has changed from that of a manager to that of the leader of school district quality and effectiveness. Four directions of emerging research support this conclusion: (1) executive leadership has an impact on school effectiveness; (2) superintendency success stories are worth noting and replicating; (3) superintendents must understand organizational dynamics in order to balance chief executive officer (CEO) leadership with empowerment reform; and (4) the political and environmental contexts affect the superintendency. Evidence of the new role is found in the current press toward improved CEO training. It is concluded that whatever reforms transpire in CEO training, there will surely be a renewed emphasis on the practical realities of leading schools toward quality improvement in the workplace. A 78-item bibliography is included. (LMI)

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ED353670

Occasional Papers:
School Leadership and Education Reform

OP #2

The Changing Role of the Local School District Superintendent in the United States

by Robert L. Crowson and T. E. Glass

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The Center is funded by a grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Grant No. R117C80003). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the National Center and authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supporting agency.

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The Changing Role of the Local School District Superintendent in the United States

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A paper prepared for presentation to the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 6, 1991.

The Changing Role of the Local School District Superintendent in the United States

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Robert L. Crowson and Thomas E. Glass

INTRODUCTION

In his history of urban school administration, Joe Cronin (1973) noted that the first administrative task assigned by the Board of the Buffalo, New York schools to its just-appointed, nineteenth-century superintendent was: Hire a horse and buggy, then go out into the city to find where the schools are located. Few superintendents, even in our largest cities, would have trouble locating the schools today. However, many of America's CEO's across the country would admit to disturbing feelings of being just as "cut off" from the "real world" of education, in schools and classrooms, as that first Buffalo superintendent.

Indeed, it is a modern-day press to reduce this isolation, toward a closer connection between local education's chief executive officers and school "effectiveness," that appears today to be the focus of a changing conception of role for America's superintendents of schools. This is not to suggest that at long last a clear, unequivocal consensus (and indeed a mandate) has been reached regarding the central function of the U. S. Superintendent. Practicing superintendents themselves split about 50-50 as to whether they are "leaders" or "managers." Local school boards still tend to identify "finances, facilities, operations, and personnel" as the top-priority activities of their CEO's. Furthermore, many other role imperatives have accompanied a greater "politicization" of the superintendency; and, the sense of superintendents themselves is that they continue to be expected "to be all things to all people" (Glass, 1991b).

BACKGROUND: THE CONTEXT OF ROLE CHANGE IN THE U. S. SUPERINTENDENCY

Nevertheless, the press upon superintendents to be leaders of instruction as well as the overseers of operations is real and growing. This is just one more anomaly among many in public education--in the amid a major reform movement seeking to transfer power downward into the hands of school-site professionals and parents, greatly renewed interest

is simultaneously looking "upward," to the work of superintendents and the superintendent's leadership in school improvement. After years of near-inattention in the study of administrative roles, the local superintendency is now "hot stuff" in the research, training, and how-to-do-it literature. Why is this? What are the "contextual" forces in American education that appear to be driving a rejuvenated inquiry into superintendents' worklives? We would suggest four.

First, there is a legitimate concern over the present and future demographics of the superintendency. Predictions are that upwards of three-quarters of all U. S. superintendents will be eligible to retire by 1994 (Hess, 1988). While this prediction may be a bit high, there is little doubt of major turnover in the superintendency during the 1990's (Glass, 1991a). The "graying" of American administrators is no less a phenomenon among building principals--the traditional pool of new applicants to the superintendency. Furthermore, larger and larger numbers of superintendents are finding that pension incentives and job stresses are deepening the appeal of age-55-and-out retirement options (McCormick, 1987; Hess, 1988).

The local superintendency has long been a preserve of white males, with (in the main) small town origins. Indeed, it is only in the most recent AASA Survey (1990) that suburban and large-urban backgrounds have begun to make sizeable inroads into the demographics of this position (Glass, 1991a). The hope is that retirements may pave the way for major infusions of women and minorities--into the creation of a professional culture that will continue to be more urban/suburban, less gender-biased, and better represent non-white America. The numbers of women, and Black and Hispanic, superintendents are increasing--but very slowly. As recorded in the mid-80's by the U. S. Census Bureau, the U. S. superintendency remains (at 96%) the "most male dominated of any of the 'executive professions' " (Glass, 1991b). Somewhat less "male domination," but not much less, is indicated in the results from the nationally sampled 1990 AASA Survey: 93.4% male (Glass, 1991a).

Blacks and Hispanics together constitute only about 2.5 percent of the U. S. pool of superintendents--in a nation expecting 35 to 40 percent of its public school population to be minority by the year 2000 (Glass, 1991a). Black and Hispanic superintendents now serve as CEO's in almost all of the 20 largest school districts in the nation, but there have been relatively few opportunities for minorities in white-majority school district contexts (Glass, 1991a). The replacement of a retiring generation of school executives with a more

demographically representative coterie of job-applicants takes "center court" in today's interest in the superintendency. Of even greater concern, however, are questions as to just how to prepare these replacements for what now may be the least well-understood role in American public education.

Second, relatedly, there is a deep sense of crisis in the current and future state of the large-urban superintendency. Amid claims that the position of the school system CEO in the nation's cities is a virtually impossible job, cities across the country (from Boston, to Detroit, to Milwaukee, to Houston, to Tucson), all in varying stages of searches, are finding fewer and fewer qualified candidates (Bradley, 1990). Fired and/or resigning in record numbers, the large-urban superintendent has been "hammered" by a national dissatisfaction with city schooling, by the increasing insurmountable challenges of central-city deterioration, and by a new politicization of the urban educational environment (Bradley, 1990).

Third, the new interest in the superintendency proceeds from a realization that: If, reform-mindedly, educational decision making is to be decentralized to its professional grassroots, then what is it that the top of the organization is expected to do? It would be a serious flaw of reform, argues Jerome Murphy (1989, 1991), to assume that public education must choose between school district centralization and decentralization. The greater likelihood is that an accommodation will be appropriate--a "balanced system" of both centralized and decentralized control. Such a system would require changed images of top-executive leadership, especially newly clarified images of just what it is a CEO can do to spur school effectiveness at the grassroots.

Fourth, interest in the superintendency reflects a renewed fascination generally with "leadership," in all of its policy making and managerial forms (Glass, 1991b). One rationale for a new focus upon the leadership supplied by the school district superintendent has been offered by Jeffrey Pfeffer (1984: 9), in observing that: (a) leadership effects will vary with level in an organizational hierarchy; but (b) leadership research has been over-concentrated upon front-line supervisors; while, (c) "if leadership has any impact, it should be evident at higher organization levels of where there is discretion in decisions and activities."

A second rationale for leadership research into the superintendency connects with the Parsonian (1960) notion that the chief executive acts critically to connect an organization

to its social and political environment. Research into the environmental "context" of leadership at all levels is on the increase, but the recent realization is that the impact of state and local context upon the leadership of superintendents is not very well understood (Wirt, 1990). There has been especially little inquiry until the recent work of Wirt (1990), as well as that of Musella and Leithwood (1988) in Canada, that seeks to connect the social and political context with the superintendent's leadership in classroom instruction.

ROLE CHANGE AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN INQUIRY

Thus, a reform movement toward enhancing bottom-up authority in public education appears to be accompanied, strangely, by a renewed interest in the work of local education's top executive. Four reasons for this may be: (a) a concern over the very demographics of the superintendency, (b) a particular worry about the large-city superintendency, (c) a concern with effectively balancing top-down and bottom-up in school management, and (d) a new sense that leadership at the top may have important linkages with effectiveness at the bottom.

Additionally, on a broader social scale, the renewed interest in the superintendency (and specifically in "effectiveness" in the superintendency) ties in closely with the nation's sense of crisis over the quality of its public schools. Chief executive officers from business, to politics, to the universities, to elementary and secondary education are being asked to provide some new leadership during troubled economic and social times (Glass, 1991b). It is interesting that even in Chicago, with its near-revolutionary transfer of authority to the grassroots, it is still the city's General Superintendent who is expected by the greater community and the media to "take charge" amid the inevitable conflicts and problems of school reform.

What are the implications of these changes in role-expectation for inquiry into (towards an understanding of) the superintendency and for school administrator training? While the brief review below is far from an exhaustive coverage, we would suggest that the following key developments in inquiry into the U. S. superintendency are underway--with important professional-preparation overtones.

It should be cautioned that our review may misleadingly suggest more structure than exists and more progress than has actually been made in an understanding of this complex role--a

role as varied as the 15,000 U. S. school districts (rural to urban, rich to poor, north to south, and small to large) that employ chief executive officers.

1. The Superintendent's Impact

In an earlier review, Crowson (1987) noted a relative lack of inquiry into how superintendents manage the internal organizational affairs of their school districts, and noted even less attention to linkages between the superintendent and school effectiveness. This review also called attention to some research showing that relatively little in the organizational life of schools (and particularly the core tasks of curriculum and instruction) seems to occur as a result of direct supervision from the central office (see, Hannaway & Sproull, 1978-79; Peterson, 1984).

This state-of-affairs in the focus of administrative inquiry is rapidly changing. Even by the time of that earlier review, Peterson, Murphy, and Hallinger (1987) had discovered that the superintendents of instructionally effective school districts were much in touch with curriculum and instruction than those in less effective districts. Vital work has been underway for some time in Canada--with Coleman and LaRocque (1988) leading the way in the western provinces and an OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) group hard at work in the East (see, Musella & Leithwood, 1988). Coleman and LaRocque (1988) find a "strong district presence" (a high-achievement ethos) in the more successful school districts.

Recently, Glass (1991b) has reviewed other work that finds superintendent differences in such achievement-improvement behaviors as: (a) setting and guiding improvement goals, (b) modeling an instructional-improvement orientation to the workplace, (c) selecting and developing principals from a better-achievement perspective, (d) bringing all school-site staff into "shared visions" of improvement, (e) monitoring school and district progress toward improvement; and, (f) bringing the school board and the larger community communicatively into the school-improvement effort (see particularly, Jacobson, 1986; Pollack et al., 1988; Paulu, 1988; Hill, Wise & Shapiro, 1989; Muller, 1989; and Buck, 1989). Many of these activities fit well into the earlier finding by Peterson (1984) that while the direct, top-down controls of superintendents over the schools may be light, the indirect influences of superintendents upon school effectiveness can be heavy (see also Cuban, 1984).

2. The Superintendent's Leadership Skills and Styles

A second, albeit related, effort in inquiry into the leadership of the superintendent has opted for a "skills" and "competencies" approach. This effort has been closely connected with AASA (the American Association of School Administrators), and with the work of John Hoyle and his colleagues at the University of Texas (see, Hoyle, 1989).

Surveys of performance goals and skills considered effectiveness-related by national samples of practicing superintendents have been assembled into such AASA documents as Skills for Successful School Leaders (1986). Some eight "performance areas" and fifty-two skills for superintendents have been extracted from the survey data--and then compared for superintendents of differing district size, composition, location, etc. The survey instruments and procedures for analysis have been replicated in other states, notably Illinois (Glass, 1991b).

Two findings are especially significant as insights into the U. S. superintendency. The first is that practicing superintendents are fully aware that the more "technical" skills of administration (e.g., finance, budgeting, service-delivery, facilities management, transportation, conflict mediation, etc.) are still vital to successful superintending. By no means does instructional leadership preclude the importance of maintaining a smoothly functioning educational organization. As one reputedly top-notch superintendent put it, when interviewed for Phi Delta Kappan: "I think superintendents have been encouraged to become chief executive officers, but we aren't CEO's. We're chief administrative officers" (Strother, 1990: 326). Indeed, if superintendents are not well grounded or are not effective performers in this technical dimension, it is reasonable to expect that they might have great difficulty in the finer skills and the staff-following necessary to instructional leadership (Glass 1991b: 41).

The second key finding in this skills research is that practicing superintendents are by no means inured to the importance of "people skills." A good deal of the school-reform rhetoric would have us believe that school districts are over-centralized and overly-bureaucratized fiefdoms of administrators trained in the autocracies of the efficiency movement. In truth, most of today's superintendents sound much more like the thirty-one year veteran interviewed for Phi Delta Kappan: "All the things that I want done get done by influencing people." "The nature of education is such that I can't give direct orders..." "I have to develop a team and influence the team members" (Strother, 1990: 326).

Beyond the "successful skills" inquiry linked to the work of AASA, one of the most promising new areas of investigation into the U. S. superintendency comes from research into the differing styles of women in educational administration. In a review drawing heavily upon the work of Pitner (1981), Shakeshaft (1987: 172) reports that: Female superintendents "...interact with teachers and students more than men do. They spend more time in the classroom or with teachers in discussions about the academic content of the school than do males and they spend more time outside of school hours with teachers."

In further comparisons, Shakeshaft (1987) claims that female superintendents: (a) are out in the buildings more of their time, (b) are more involved with community members, (c) are more likely to be more informal and democratic/participatory in style, and (d) report more loneliness in the job than men. In her own wide-ranging studies of women in the superintendency, Colleen Bell (1988) cautions, however, that women in administration vary widely in style--from central-office denizens to out-in-the-schools types and from order-givers to team-leaders. It would be a mistake to lump all persons, by gender, into one of two administrative "camps."

3. The Superintendent and the Organizational Hierarchy

The folklore of educational administration has been filled with recognition of a necessary balancing between tight and loose hierarchical controls. Leadership is sought that presents an astute combination of "initiating structure" and consideration," or the idiographic and the nomothetic, or task-centeredness and people-centeredness. Despite this long tradition of admonitions toward a "balanced" leadership in school administration, there has been surprisingly little investigation into the mix of controls (top-down to bottom-up) that do characterize the work-a-day world of a school district's administrative hierarchy. This, despite the tantalizing insight Richard Carlson (1972: 97) gave us decades ago, in observing that a superintendent "...who wants to influence all sectors of the school system must establish different authority relationships for teachers and for administrators."

Interestingly, amid our fascination in the U. S. with loose-coupling and classroom teacher "empowerment," there is now a new examination of the organizational hierarchy. Some important work, particularly that of Barr and Dreeben (1983) has been starting at the classroom level, looking at the bottom-of-the-organization effects of controls pressing downward. Other work, notably that of Kent Peterson (1984) started at the top--looking at the impacts of direct and indirect controls (from resources to supervisory "pressures")

exercised by superintendents over the school-site. Canadian researchers, particularly Coleman and LaRocque (1988) and Musella and Leithwood (1988), have been examining "multi-level effects" all along education's organizational hierarchy. And, some valuable methodological developments in the quantitative analysis of hierarchical effects have been produced by Bryk (1988) and by Bidwell (1980, 1985).

Although this focus in school district inquiry is to new and too disparate to properly categorize or effectively summarize, we would note at least three directions in organizational research that promise insights into the superintendency:

First, there is the somewhat discouraging (but still vital and "eye-opening" work) that has been pulled together by Bill Boyd (1989) under his label: "Institutional Deficiency Theory" (see also, Boyd & Crowson, 1981; Boyd & Hartman, 1988; Sykes & Elmore, 1989). Boyd (1989: 6) argues that school systems as they are presently organized "are strongly inclined toward inefficiency and goal-displacement"--with, often, a "perverse" system of incentives accumulating into a workplace that acts to frustrate professionalism and goal-attainment. Drawing upon some rapidly-emerging work on the "micro-politics" of schools and school-districts, Boyd (1989: 8) notes the existence of "mutual non-interference pacts," scratch-my-back exchanges, compromises, and "treaties" "...throughout the entire hierarchy of school systems" (see Rosenholtz, 1985; Hoyle, 1985, 1986; Blase, 1988, 1989). Additionally, there are growing indications that incentive problems in the public schools (the reward structures in which people find themselves) tend often to lead toward the pursuit of self-interests in disharmony with hierarchical objectives (see, Michaelsen, 1977, 1981; Crowson & Boyd, 1988; Shapiro & Crowson, 1990). It is not at all unusual for a superintendent's office to believe it is leading the school district in direction X, only to discover much later that the district's own incentives have pulled lower-level participants in direction Y (see, Crowson & Morris, 1990).

A second body of work has begun to probe deeply into multi-level relationships and interactions within school districts. An important contribution comes from the work of Jane Hannaway (1988) in her study of the allocation of "risk" in both school and profit-sector settings. Such foci as risk-allocation tie well into a new examination of hierarchies from the perspective of "agency" (Moe, 1984)--wherein hierarchies are seen as chains of principal-agent relationships, chains which can extend well beyond organizational boundaries into political hierarchies of education.

In addition to the political problem of risk, the new agency-oriented examination of hierarchy pays careful attention to conflicts of interest, information asymmetries, and employee-interest influences upon work products up and down the organization. Briefly illustrated, the effect of "risk" is nicely captured by the McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast (1987) study of the "monitoring" engaged in by public boards of control, including school boards. Monitoring tends most often to be reactive (of a "fire-alarm" variety)--in that dissatisfaction arises only after (often some ill-conceived or impolitic) bureaucratic action has been taken. This form of monitoring, it is found, can become a cost consideration to public-sector CEO's--who, never sure just when or under what conditions an alarm will be raised, may be extremely cautious and overprotective.

The effects of positional "interests" within the up-and-down relationships of the school district hierarchy can be nicely illustrated in the work of Ellen Goldring (1986, 1988) and Colleen Bell (1988). Goldring discovered that building principals were more likely to engage parents in the work life of their schools when the parental community represented a condition of uncertainty for the school-site (e.g., a record of assertiveness). Eager-to-participate, but less assertive parental communities would receive less attention. Interestingly, Goldring (1988) also found that principals serving assertive and uncertain communities were somewhat less likely to be fully responsive to directives and incentives from the superintendent's office. On the other side of much the same coin, Bell (1988) discovered that local school boards which appoint women as superintendents often communicate a concern as to whether she can "handle" the superintendency. Consequently, many women may feel a need to demonstrate a strong command of "the authority that is vested in the position at the top of the school hierarchy." In doing so, they later draw censure for too much "decisiveness and directness."

The problem of information asymmetry is nicely illustrated in some survey research by Ellen Wolf (1988). Surveying both superintendents and building principals in the same school districts, Wolf discovered major differences in an understanding of "what is important" in the work priorities of one another. Superintendents indicated, for example, that the working relationship with the school board had their highest priority. Their principals thought this should be the lowest of the superintendent's priorities. This, and other research by Kroeze (1989), Crowson and Morris (1990), and Peterson (1984)--lends support to Hannaway's (1988: 91-92) observation that managers from top to bottom are often forced to operate "with only limited and perhaps biased information about what is going on in their organization."

Finally, a third perspective on the superintendent and the organizational hierarchy is returning informatively to some psychology-of-it-all inquiry, as introduced ably by Carlson (1972). Carlson's (1972) investigation into the interaction of succession and performance in the U. S. superintendency, and particularly differences between career-bound and place-bound superintendents, remains a major research contribution. More recently, there are new questions about the superintendent's positioning in efforts to change organizations which essentially "can't be led" (Bennis, 1989). There are many more questions than answers to date. Firestone (1990: 371) urges the research community to learn more "about how chief executive formulate the problems to which substantial organizational change is the answer." McPherson (1988) asks for careful investigation into relationships between the delegation of authority/responsibility under centralized vs. decentralized systems--and the organizational commitment, loyalty, and value-formation that ensues. And, Cuban (1984) speaks for a widespread research interest in asking us to learn more about the "choreographing" role of the superintendency, in developing a shared sense of mission and establishing a positive instructional climate for the school district.

4. The Superintendency and "Politics"

Although the application of political analysis to education was essentially neglected prior to the 1950's, the ensuing decades have produced a rich literature on education politics (Mitchell, 1990). Much of this literature can be applied, directly or indirectly, to an improved understanding of the public school superintendency.

An early research theme was the revisionist argument that the "don't-mix-them" norm of separating politics from administration was decidedly out of touch with the realities of school management. Politics and administration inevitably mix; and school district superintendents are necessarily politicians. Some important spin-offs from this them have been: (a) the political vulnerability thesis of the U. S. superintendency, sparked by Callahan (1962), and ably followed-up in the "dissatisfaction" work of Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) (see also Eaton, 1990); (b) a long series of investigations into, and a fascinating academic debate around, the degree of political conflict actually faced by work-a-day superintendents (Crowson, 1987); and, (c) a number of board-superintendent studies, asking to what extent the superintendent dominates or is dominated by the local school board (see, Cistone, 1975).

Insights into the U. S. superintendency have also been forthcoming in the form of politics-oriented investigations into the resolution of key issues in local education. Among these issues in school desegregation, collective bargaining, religion-in-the-schools, school finance, federal program implementation, and (most recently) school reform/restructuring (see Mitchell, 1990). An understanding of the administrative context in local U. S. education has bee further enriched through the availability of an insightful literature on federal/state impacts (including court influences) upon the local schools (Peterson & Wong, 1986; Odden & Marsh, 1998)--with added insights into the limits on administrative decision making that are posed by the environmental/political context (see Peterson, 1981; Wong, 1990).

However, despite a rich (and steadily growing) politics-of-local-education literature, there has not been much attention until recently to that which Fred Wirt (1990) calls "the missing link" in instructional leadership. The missing link is the (as yet not well known) relationship between the community context (and of course the politics thereof) and the superintendent's ability to affect classroom instruction.

Like all linkages, this contextual impact is not easily unearthed. Wirt (1990), however, has supplied some early, grounded theory that has considerable insight-potential. In recognition of historical inquiry into the superintendency, particularly the work of Tyack and Hansot (1982), Wirt (1990) starts his model with a sense of differences in the "value intensity" of superintendents. Tyack and Hansot (1982) effectively established the critical "values" link between superintendents and their communities in their remarkable monograph Managers of Virtue. Wirt (190) creatively adds to the values dimension a second linkage, labeled "community conflict intensity." Putting the constructs together, Wirt (1990) suggests that the superintendent's capacity to exert leadership over the school-site and over instruction will vary along the two-dimensional scale of high-to-low conflict and high-to-low value intensity.

Similar theorizing, tying the community context to workrole differences and differences in the instructional leadership of building principals, has been offered by Mitchell (1990). Earlier, Lortie (1988) reported relationships between the SES of the school-site and the leadership of the principal--including a link between school SES and the nature of interactions between superintendents and their respective principals. And, of course, the earliest study of community context and the superintendency was David Miner's (1966)

now-classic inquiry into the conflict-resolution styles of superintendents of differing community SES.

Thus, political "context" has by no means been ignored in the study of administrative leadership; but it is only recently in the U. S. that political scientists have begun to attempt a merger of community politics and the internal organizational determinants of school district productivity. This work will no doubt increase in importance and will no doubt join a growing research effort to understand better the environmental influences upon school and student achievement generally (see, Stockard & Mayberry, 1990).

TRAINING SUPERINTENDENTS FOR "EFFECTIVENESS"

In short, we have argued thus far that there is a new focus upon the local school district superintendency in these reform-minded times in U. S. education--a focus with a decided "impact" and "effectiveness" flavor. There is a renewed research interest in a better understanding of productivity-producing linkages between the superintendent's office and the school-site; the leadership skills and styles of effective superintendents; the mysteries of the organizational hierarchy in local education, and leadership therein; and the political/contextual determinants of administrative leadership-toward-effectiveness.

None of these redirections in research emphasis, however, has come close to approaching the growing debate in and expressions of concern over the graduate-level preparation of U. S. superintendents. Described, in no-nonsense terms, as "an American tragedy" by Richard Gibboney (1987), the preparation of educational administrators is under heavy fire--with reform proposals and state legislation aplenty surfacing to "set it right." In these concern-for-quality times, the many reports and proposals "...that address the training and preparation of school administrators basically assert these to be generally haphazard, unregulated, and, for the most part, ineffectual in producing the type of executive our schools and school systems require, and have a right to expect" (Glass, 1990: 62). Such "radical" proposals are now surfacing as "alternate-route" licensure programs--permitting entry to school administration without formal, professional preparation and credentialing (Olson, 1990).

One of the hardest hitting and most comprehensive of the proposals for reform is that of the National Policy Board for Education Administration (Leaders for America's Schools, 1987). The report criticized the casual and haphazard recruitment efforts of educational

administration programs, their typically low standards for admission, their lack of rigor, their weak ties with the realities of practice, and their less-than-outstanding academic faculties (see, Murphy, 1990). Among the reform proposals were recommendations to: (a) mount vigorous recruitment efforts (particularly to attract bright candidates of diverse race, ethnicity, and sex); (b) raise admission standards; (c) require the doctorate in educational administration as a prerequisite to national certification and state licensure; (d) require a full-time year of academic residency and a full year of field residency for all degree candidates; (e) create long-term clinical partnerships with school districts; and, (f) limit the number of preparation programs to those which can maintain "a critical mass of at least five full-time faculty members" (Murphy, 1990: 184). Among the most far-reaching and controversial of the proposals was the Policy Board's advocacy of a "national professional standards board" for school administration, with a national certification examination and a national accreditation of administrator preparation programs (Murphy, 1990).

Critics of the National Policy Board's proposals worry that the standardization, and particularly the standardized testing that is proposed, could work against the goal of diversity. The critics also charge that: (a) there's no strong evidence the Ed.D. degree is decidedly better administrator preparation; (b) the full-time academic and field residencies pose a career hardship to the large number of necessarily part-time certification candidates; and, (c) the national assessment and accreditation proposals "move ahead of the technological base" in the field (see, Erlandson, 1990: 190). Furthermore, there's a worry among some of the "lesser" academic programs that the whole national certification scene could be dominated by those universities "who classify themselves as the academic elite" (Erlandson, 1990: 190).

Whatever the specific direction, there is no doubt that the renewed research interest in the superintendency is accompanied by a serious concern over the quality of preparation available to the next generation of school leaders in the United States. It remains to be seen whether reform moves most heavily toward the "alternate-route" options already under experimentation in New Jersey, the proposals of the National Policy Board, or the skill-and competency-based approach offered by AASA in its National School Executive Development Center (Glass, 1991b).

There is probably much likelihood that the future of superintendent preparation in the U. S. will involve: (a) much more attention to a bridging of theory and practice (of academia

and the workplace) and a new "clinical" thrust in superintendent training (e.g., using "lighthouse" districts and administrators); (b) a new attention to the preparation lessons to be learned from "success stories" in the superintendency (and particularly the successes of women and minorities); plus, (c) a renewed attention among practicing administrators themselves, within their professional associations, to the collegial/cooperative improvement of both pre-placement and on-the-job preparation for the superintendency.

SUMMARY

The local school district superintendency is the least thoroughly researched role in American public education. Strangely, amid our reform-to-the-grassroots movements, interest in the work of the superintendency is growing. This is because: (a) large numbers of them are retiring, and retiring early; (b) there is a legitimate concern with changing the lop-sided demographics of this important executive position; (c) the large-city superintendency is in deep distress; (d) the reform movement is realizing that some top-down must accompany bottom-up; plus, (e) the nation is looking everywhere, and particularly to the CEO, for some leadership in these troubled school-quality times.

While the role of the U. S. superintendent is not easily described and varies with context, we would argue that there is a changing conception of the job--from "manager" and "efficiency expert" to leader of school district quality and "effectiveness." Four directions of emerging research interest support this conclusion. First, earlier conclusions that superintendents have almost no contact with the schools are giving way to findings that "impact" can be found and top-executive leadership (even if just a "presence") can make a difference. Second, "success stories" in the superintendency are to be found throughout the nation--and the skills/competencies of successful superintendents are worth noting and replicating. Third, superintendents must exert leadership downward through an organization, and an understanding of how that organization works (for example, allocates risk) is important to a balancing of CEO leadership with "empowerment" reform. Fourth, the political and environmental context of the superintendency is being explored anew, toward a heretofore unaddressed linkage between community politics and the superintendent's instructional leadership.

If a changing conception of role is "quietly" reflected in new research, the "hot" evidence in the U. S. is to be found in a vigorous press toward improved CEO training. Charges are that superintendent-preparation programs have not trained candidates adequately in

leadership-toward-effectiveness, have not drawn the best-and-the-brightest into administration, have not resolved the demographic bias of the superintendency, and have not tied theory informatively into practice. Proposals and legislation toward the reform of administrator preparation are important policy issues at present--from alternative-route licensure to national certification to administrator-association involvement in skills and competencies development. Whatever the reforms-to-come in CEO training, there is surely to be a renewed emphasis upon the practical realities of leading schools toward quality-improvement in the workplace.

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